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## Online ads and marketing drive fast-growing Web sites

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SAN JOSE, California (AP) -- Online ads and so-called viral marketing techniques appear to be paying off for some of the Internet's fastest growing Web sites.

Marketing -- whether in the form of giveaway gimmicks or online word-of-mouth methods -- contributed to the high traffic volume of the top 10 sites logging new visitors in June, according to a study released Thursday by Media Metrix Inc., the Internet equivalent of TV's Nielsen audience measurement service.

Humor site PassThisOn.com topped the list with 4.9 million new visitors by employing a technique known as viral marketing, which relies on customer referrals to its site. Another humor site, Debsfunpages.com, made it to the top 10, by using the same technique. Users of those sites are prompted to e-mail cartoons and jokes to friends, and to get the jokes, e-mail recipients are linked back to the site.

"It's like the plague," Media Metrix spokeswoman Catherine Yao said of the viral marketing technique.

The study found that seven of the top 10 sites conducted online advertising campaigns between December 1999 and June 2000. The remaining three sites that didn't do any advertising used some form of viral marketing.

The entertainment genre dominated the list with four sites. Other top categories included retail, business or finance services.

"People are looking for ways to make money off the Internet, ways to be entertained and ways to manage their lives, and these sites capitalize on those needs," Yao said.

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